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Death of a Salesman

by

Arthur Miller

1949



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes.com Staff

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The play is told partly through the mind and memory of Willy Loman. The times of the play fluctuate between the year 1942 and 1928. Miller uses various techniques in setting to help distinguish when the actors are in the present time or in the past. Most of the play is set in one part of the Loman house. When the action of the play is in the present (1942), the characters observe all the physical boundaries such as doors and walls. But when the time shifts to the past, the characters ignore the walls and walk right.....

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Willy Loman - a travelling salesman who has worked for the Wagner firm for thirty-four years. He is now sixty-one years old and has been cruelly taken off salary and put on straight commission. At the end of the play, he is fired from his job.

Linda Loman - Willy Loman's wife, who truly loves her husband. She is a mother figure in the play, though more to her husband than to her sons.

Biff Loman - the eldest son of Willy Loman. He was a star football player in high school with several scholarships, but for the last fourteen years, he has been moving from one job.....

Happy Loman - the younger son of Willy Loman. He works in a department store and.....

Charley - a life-long acquaintance of the Lomans. He is a sincere, hard worker and a

Bernard - Charley's son who has become a very successful lawyer. He was a childhood friend of Biff.

Ben - Willy's dead brother who left home early and became tremendously rich. He appears only in....

Minor Characters

Howard Wagner - the son of the former owner of the Wagner Company. He now runs.....

Miss Frances - the woman in Boston with whom Willy has an affair.

Letta and Miss Forsythe - the two women that Happy picks up in the restaurant.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. Willy Loman is the protagonist. He is a traveling salesman, the low man of popular.....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all. The antagonist is the false promise of the American Dream, which makes people believe that anyone in the United States can become rich through only hard work, perseverance, or personality. The dream also seems to say that the.....

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. Biff, Willy's son, makes his father see that both he and Willy are failures, who will never obtain the American Dream. Biff makes his father realize the emptiness of their.....

Outcome - The play ends in tragedy. Willy commits suicide in order to financially provide for.....

SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Willy Loman has been a traveling salesman for the Wagner Company for thirty-four years. He likes to think of himself as being vital to the New England territory. As the play opens, Willy has just come back home after having left New England earlier that morning. He tells his wife Linda that he has returned unexpectedly because he cannot seem to keep his mind on driving anymore. Linda thinks that he needs a long rest. He asks about his sons, who are home for the first time in years.

Willy has trouble understanding why Biff, his thirty-four year old son, cannot find a job and keep it. After all, Biff is attractive and was a star football player in high school with several scholarships; however, he could not finish his education, for he flunked math. When Biff went to Boston to find his father and explain the failure to him, he found Willy in his hotel room having an affair with a strange woman. Afterwards, Biff held a grudge against his father, never trusting him again.

Biff and his brother Happy try to think of some job that Biff could get that would allow him to settle down in New York. Biff thinks of a man named Bill Oliver, for whom he was worked; Biff believes he can get a loan of ten thousand dollars from Oliver in order to begin a business of his own. Biff and Happy tell Willy about their plans. Willy explains to his sons that the important things in life are to be well liked and to be attractive. Willy assures Biff that he is attractive and that Oliver has always liked him.

The next day, Willy is to meet his sons for dinner at a restaurant to hear how Oliver has reacted to Biff's request for a loan. Willy himself goes to young Howard Wagner, the present owner of the firm for which he works, and asks for a transfer to New York City. Howard tells him there is no room for him in.....

THEMES

Major Theme - The falsity of the American Dream is the dominant theme of Arthur Miller's play. Willy Loman represents the primary target of this dream. Like most middle-class working men, he struggles to provide financial security for his family and dreams about making himself a huge financial success. After years of working as a traveling salesman, Willy Loman has only an old car, an empty house, and a defeated spirit. Miller chose the job of salesman carefully for his American Dreamer. A salesman does.....

Minor Theme - The tragedy of the dysfunctional family, which helps to keep the American Dream alive, is a second important theme of Miller's play. Linda and Happy especially work very hard to keep the fantasy of the dream of success alive. In the dysfunctional Loman family, the wife is restricted to the role of housekeeping and bolstering her husband's sense of self-importance and purpose. A contradictory role given to.....

MOOD

The mood is uncomfortably false and depressing throughout the play. The audience is always aware of the family's trying to keep the truth from one another. The failure of the.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Arthur Miller was born in New York City on October 17, 1915. His father, Isadore Miller, was prosperous as a shop owner and a manufacturer of women's coats; however, he lost his fortune in the stock market crash of 1929. The young Miller was forced to work a number of odd jobs to support himself, including being a farm hand. The years after the Depression were formative years for Miller, during which the formerly indifferent student began reading on his own and developing a strong social conscience and sense of justice. He eventually entered the University of Michigan, where he began writing plays and worked on the college newspaper. After graduating in 1938, he moved back to New York, where he continued writing, primarily dramas.

Arthur Miller's plays met with great success. *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, produced in 1944, won a prize offered by New York City's Theatre Guild. His first major success, however, came in 1947 with *All My Sons*, which won a Drama Critics Circle Award and was made into a film the following year. *Death of a Salesman*, Miller's most famous work produced in 1949, won a Pulitzer Prize and was made into a film in 1952. *Death of a Salesman* casts a cold eye on the American Dream and the moral compromises necessary to achieve it. Its hero, the hapless salesman Willy Loman, is a man struggling to make sense of his place in a society that has chewed him up and is preparing to spit him out. *The Crucible*, a Tony Award winning play produced in 1953, is one of Miller's finest works, which also shows the playwright's strong social conscience. Set during the Salem witch trials at the end of the 17th century, it is written as a critique of the extremes and.....

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As a dramatist, Miller has more in common with Ibsen, Shaw, Chekov, and Brecht than with his fellow American playwrights, Eugene O'Neil or Thornton Wilder. With Ibsen, Shaw, and Chekov, Miller shares in common the philosophy that the fate of a person is social and that the stage should be considered as a medium more important for ideas than for mere entertainment. As a dramatist, Miller is a moralist, and his plays have a serious intellectual purpose.

The theater of twentieth century America took a long time to come of age. No American dramatist in the early 1900's dared to experiment with subjects, ideas, or production techniques because theatre was regarded as business. Slowly, in response to the plays of European realistic dramatists, American theater began to change. The years between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Depression saw.....

ACT SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

ACT 1

Summary

Willy Loman, a traveling salesman for the Wagner Company, comes on stage carrying his suitcase, which is described as "his burden". Willy has suddenly come back home because he cannot keep his mind on driving. He tells Linda, his wife, that he was having strange dreams as he drove. She says that Willy needs a long rest. She also suggests that he talk to his manager about getting a transfer from the New England territory to someplace closer to New York. Willy, however, feels that he is vital to the New England territory.

Willy asks Linda about his sons, who are home for the first time in years. He is particularly concerned about Biff, his thirty-four year old son who cannot find a job and keep it. He cannot understand Biff's troubles since he is so attractive, a trait that is very important in Willy's mind.

Willy complains of being suffocated in the city, feeling "all boxed in." Linda suggests that they take a ride in the country on Sunday and open the windshield. Willy tells her that the windshields do not open on the new cars. He then thinks about his old 1928 Chevrolet.

The scene next shifts to the bedroom of Biff and Happy, the two sons of Willy, who discuss their father. Happy tells Biff that he is worried that Willy's driver's license may be taken away from him. Biff complains about Willy constantly mocking him. He feels that he cannot establish a rapport with his father. Happy tells him that Willy talks about Biff all the time.

Biff then begins to tell Happy about his life for the last fourteen years. He says he can never keep a job because when spring comes, he feels like moving on to another place. Biff remembers that he had once stolen a carton of basketballs from one of his coaches, Bill Oliver, and wonders whether Oliver still remembers him. Happy assures Biff that Oliver always thought highly of him because he was so well liked.

Happy tells Biff that he has most of the things he ever wanted--his own apartment, a car, and relationships with women; in spite of these things, he still feels lonely. Biff thinks his brother should be working outside in the open air and should settle down with a nice steady woman, one like their mother. Their conversation is interrupted by Willy, who is talking rather loudly to himself. Biff resents that his mother still tolerates Willy's behavior.

The scene next shifts to Willy, who is talking to himself and reflecting on a time in 1928 when he had come back from a trip. Young Biff and Happy come on the stage dressed as young boys, to indicate that Willy is thinking of the old days. The boys are excited about the punching bag that their father has bought for them. When Willy asks Biff about his new football, the boy tells him that he borrowed it from the locker room so he can practice. Happy remarks that Biff will get into trouble because he has stolen the football, but Willy thinks that the coach will probably congratulate him on his initiative. Willy tells the boys that he will have his own business some day and will not have to go on any more trips. Before then, he promises to take the boys with him on a trip up through New England.

Bernard, a friend of Biff, arrives. He reminds Biff that they are supposed to study, stating that the math teacher has threatened to flunk Biff. Willy, however, thinks that it is unnecessary for a boy who has made a mark in athletics to study. When Biff does not respond, Bernard leaves. Biff then tells his father that Bernard is liked but not well liked. Willy says that good marks in school do not ensure success in life. What really matters is being well liked and being personally attractive.

While Willy is conversing with young Biff and Happy, Linda enters the scene carrying a basket of wash. Willy tells her how great he was on the road and how much he has sold. Linda tells him how much debt they owe, and Willy realizes that they owe more than he has made. Later Willy says he is worried that people do not like him. Linda, who is mending some silk stockings, assures Willy that he is well liked. Willy worries whether he has lost his personal attractiveness, but Linda assures him that he is still a handsome man. The silk stockings trigger a flashback for Willy. Suddenly a woman appears in his thoughts. She is laughing while she gets dressed. She says that she picked Willy out because he is such a joker. As she leaves, she thanks Willy for the stockings he gave her.

Willy returns to the present and tells Linda how lonesome he gets on the road. He also reassures her that things will get better and has her stop mending the stockings. Bernard then re-appears in Willy's mind and reminds Biff to study. Willy now gets mad at Biff for not studying and threatens to whip him. He then changes his mind and says that he does not want Biff to be a worm like Bernard, for Biff has got spirit and personality.

As the lights begin to return to indicate the present, Happy comes down to check on his father. He says that he is going to retire his dad, which Willy considers to be ridiculous. Willy then remembers his dead brother Ben and says that he should have gone to Alaska and become rich with him. At this point, Charley enters and sends Happy away. He sits with Willy to play cards and offers his friend a job; Willy, however, refuses. Charley tells Willy not to worry so much about Biff. As he and Charley are talking, Brother Ben appears to Willy in an illusion, but Ben is in a hurry. Back in the present, Willy insults Charley, who gets up and leaves.

Willy now turns his full attention to his illusion of Ben, who says that he went into the jungle when he was seventeen and came out rich at twenty-one. Willy asks Ben about their parents. Ben says that their father made flutes and then went about the country selling them. Biff and Happy appear as youngsters. Ben tells Biff to hit him in the stomach to show how tough he is. Before the boy can act, Ben trips Biff and tells him to never fight fair, especially with a stranger. Willy sends the boys to the neighboring construction project to steal lumber so as to show Ben how fearless they are. Ben says he must leave to tend to the stock exchange. Willy pleads with him to stay, to no avail. As Ben leaves, he assures Willy that his sons are "manly chaps."

Linda comes downstairs to check on Willy, who is going for a walk even though he is wearing house slippers. Biff asks his mother what is wrong with his dad. Linda explains how his coming home affects his father; Biff's presence seems to agitate him. Linda tells her son that he has to learn to respect Willy and pay attention to him. She also tells Biff that after thirty-four years of service, the company has put Willy back on straight commission. Biff says that the company is ungrateful. Linda tells him that the company is no worse than Biff and Happy. Biff refuses to take the blame and accuses his father of being a fake.

Linda tells Biff that Willy is trying to commit suicide. Sometime back, when he was in a car wreck, the insurance company investigated whether it was a deliberate attempt. Another time Linda found a rubber hose attached to the gas pipe. She pleads with Biff, telling him that Willy's life is in his hands. Biff's answer is that they should all be in jobs where they can work outside and whistle when they want.

In the next scene, Willy re-enters. Happy tells Willy that Biff is going to see Bill Oliver. Willy is excited over the idea. Happy even suggests that they form two Loman brothers teams and compete against each other for publicity. Willy says that if they do so they could lick the world together. Willy then gives some pointers to Biff to make his appointments with Oliver a success. He tells him to wear a dark suit, to talk little, and to tell no jokes. Biff says that he will ask Oliver for ten thousand dollars, but Willy says that ten is too little and tells him to ask for fifteen thousand. His advice to Biff is "if you start out big, you end up big." He then decides that Biff should begin with a couple of jokes because "personality" always wins the day. When Linda tries to say something, Willy yells at her. Biff resents this, and he and Willy argue again. Willy leaves, and Biff thinks with ten thousand dollars he can really do great things.

Linda follows Willy up to the bedroom and reminds him of the plumbing problem. He feels that suddenly everything is falling to pieces. Biff and Happy come in to the room to say good night. Willy gives more advice to Biff about what to do in the interview with Oliver and reminds him that he has greatness in him. Happy tells his parents that he is going to get married. Biff goes down to the kitchen and removes the rubber tubing.

Notes

In the first act, the reader is introduced to the Loman family. Willy lives most of his life in a world of illusion in which he romanticizes his past, and his family does nothing to stop him. Although his illusions have been with him all his life, the problem is that now, in his later years, Willy is having trouble distinguishing between past and present, appearance and reality. In the opening scene, Willy comes home and tells Linda he has been driving with the windshield open. When she suggests that they take a ride later with the windshield open, he says windshields are no longer made to open. He has earlier confused his present car with his old 1928 Chevy, in which the windshields did open. The period around 1928 seems to be the last happy time in Willy's life; it was the time when Biff was a high school senior and the captain and star of the football team.

It quickly becomes apparent in this first act that Willy's personal philosophy of life deals entirely with superficial values; he is concerned with appearance rather than substance. He believes the most important things in the world, in both social and business environments, are to be well liked and attractive; unfortunately, he has also taught his sons these values, and they are seen espousing them as their own. Willy also feels nostalgic for the olden days, when everyone lived on a farm. In the city, he always complains of feeling "boxed in" and tells Linda that "nothing will grow here." As life begins to close in on Willy, this idea is symbolically portrayed in Willy's inability to get anything to grow in his back yard. The image of Willy trying to plant seeds that never spring to life is symbolic of the failure of the American Dream to come to fruition for Willy and most other working class people. Hard work and dedication do not bring Willy success; instead, he finds himself in old age to be poor, out of work, and dissatisfied with life.

As he wanders in and out of illusions, Willy often contradicts himself. For instance, Willy says of Biff, "The trouble is he's lazy. Biff is a lazy bum!" Yet, later, he says, "There's one thing about Biff--he is not lazy." In a fleeting moment of reality, Willy truthfully criticizes Biff, but he returns to his illusions that "personal attractiveness" is all a man needs to succeed. In his illusory world, nothing is wrong with Biff. Happy and Biff also live in a world of illusion. Biff casually mentions to Happy that he stole some basketballs from Oliver, trying to insert reality into the world of the Loman fantasies. Happy tries to overlook the dishonesty and tells Biff that Oliver always thought highly of Biff. In a later flashback, Willy remembers Biff saying that he "borrowed" a football from the locker room; Happy states the reality that Biff has stolen the ball and is sure to get in trouble. Willy brushes off the dishonesty by saying the coach would probably be proud of Biff for taking the initiative to practice. Later, Willy actually sends his sons out to steal lumber, in order to impress Ben. Willy's lack of morality on the issue of honesty greatly affects Biff and his ability to hold a job.

Like Willy, Happy also lies to himself about his work and about his appearance; he constantly tells his father that he is successfully losing weight, improving his attractiveness. He also erroneously believes that as soon as the merchandise manager dies, he will become the new manager. It is doubtful, however, that such a promotion would make Happy happy. He says that he already has everything he wants, an apartment, a car, and women, and he still feels lonely. Biff is obviously a lonely idealist as well. He believes that all the Loman problems can be fixed by simply working outdoors where they will have the freedom to whistle when they want.

In Act 1, Miller explores the relationship between the son and the father. Biff feels that he can never communicate with Willy, and this feeling mounts until the climax of the play when Biff tries to force reality upon his dad. Biff has difficulty with the way that Willy treats his mother. He also has problems with Willy's world of illusions. In truth, the fact that Willy has always excused his son for his behavior is a real problem for Biff, for he has developed no backbone. In later acts, it is revealed that Biff has lost every job because of stealing. In fact, Biff actually goes to jail for theft. In spite of Biff's many problems, Willy is obviously very partial to him. Happy constantly stands in the shadow of his elder brother, unnoticed and craving the attention of his father.

Willy is not realistic about his earnings. He brags to Linda that he made \$1200 gross in Boston, but when Linda calculates the commission, he has to admit that he made only \$200 gross on the entire trip. Even in his illusion, he cannot face the fact that he is not a good salesman. At times, Linda hints at the reality of their economic straits. She seems to be the one in the family most affected by the reality of their poverty. Yet, she is terribly guilty of allowing Willy to live in his world of illusion. At times when he tries to face reality, Linda places him squarely back into his fantasy world. When Willy tells Linda that people do not seem to like him and laugh at him for talking too much, Linda tells him that he is a wonderful man whom everyone likes. Perhaps Linda contributes to his illusions because she knows there is nothing else to the man.

Willy's infidelities to Linda are revealed early in the play. In a flashback, Biff remembers the time he caught Willy in his hotel room with a strange woman; after the discovery, Biff never fully trusted his father again. As Willy stands before Linda as she mends the holes in her silk stockings, his guilt takes him years back when he stood in a hotel room and gave silk stockings to his lover. Willy responds to his guilt with empty promises, saying he is going to make it all up to Linda.

Linda's character is developed in this first act. She is the traditional wife and mother, staying at home to care for her family. Linda accuses Biff and Happy of being disrespectful to their father and begs them to pay Willy more attention. Though she loves her sons, her husband's interests are her primary concern. In fact, she asks Biff not to come home again unless he learns to respect his father. Linda's speeches in the play often represent Miller's social conscience. Her words of advice to her sons are Miller's words of advice to the younger generation to learn to respect the individual, no matter his or her status in life. It is also a plea for people not to

be discarded in their old age .

Part of the American Dream is to one day own one's own business, for the belief is that ownership will make one rich. It is part of the dream of rugged individualism as a means to success. It is not surprising that Willy dreams of owing his own business and has planted this dream in the minds of his sons. Biff wants to borrow the money from Oliver to start his own company and become successful. It is also not surprising that Willy judges his brother, Ben, to be the ideal, the symbol of the American Dream. After all, he walked into the jungle as a young man and emerged a rich gentleman four years later. Of course, Ben is dead and his been dead for a while, indicating that all was not perfect for Willy's brother.

When Willy questions Ben, in an illusion, about his secret for success, the answer is frightening. Ben clearly tells the young Biff that one must never fight fair, especially with a stranger; as a result, he cruelly trips a young, unsuspecting Biff. Willy tries to impress his brother by sending his sons to steal lumber in order to prove that Biff and Happy are fearless boys. The pathetic philosophies of Willy and Ben are probably due in part to their own father, who was a traveling salesman, peddling musical flutes that he made. Although Willy is a salesman like him, he must sell products that belong to others, a step below the salesmanship of his father.

Willy has based his career as a salesman on being well liked. In sales, where a person does not have mastery of a body of knowledge, it is important to be able to please others, to gain their trust to buy a product. Through most of his sales life, Willy has felt successful, not because he has made much money, but because he feels like his customers in New England have liked him. Now he even questions this fact and complains about it to his wife. Reinforcing Willy's world of illusions, Linda assures him that everyone likes Willy. The audience, however, knows this is not true. Biff does not really like his father, and even his friend Charley gets easily irritated with Willy.

It becomes obvious that Willy is jealous of Charley, who is hard working, sincere, and practical. He is also successful in life; but Charley, ironically, is the exact opposite of what Willy believes a man needs to be successful. Charley has no personal attractiveness; he is not adventurous; and he is not well liked. Yet Charley has the financial security that Willy longs for. Out of subconscious, petty jealousy, Willy insults Charley in every scene where they are together; the jealousy also prevents Willy from accepting the job offer from Charley, even though he desperately needs to work.

In the later part of the scene, Bernard is introduced as the opposite of Biff, who is a practical boy and a good student. Not surprisingly, both Biff and Willy laugh at Bernard. Biff says that Bernard is liked but not well liked. Willy discourages Biff from befriending Bernard, for he thinks he is a "worm" and an unpopular, unattractive boy. Later in the play the unattractive Bernard is shown as a successful man, while the physically attractive Biff is a complete failure.

The first act also foreshadows the suicide of the last act. Linda points out that Willy has already made a number of attempts at suicide. She even goes as far as to issue an admonition to Biff, stating that "his life is in your hands." At the end of the first act, Biff responds by taking the rubber hose from the hot water tank as a preventive measure. The irony is that Biff drives his father to suicide by making him realize the emptiness of his life. With further irony, Willy kills himself so that Biff will have a better chance in life.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Willy Loman - Willy Loman is the main character and protagonist of the play. He has been a traveling salesman, the lowest of positions, for the Wagner Company for thirty-four years. Never very successful in sales, Willy has earned a meager income and owns little. His refrigerator, his car, and his house are all old –

used up and falling apart, much like Willy. Willy, however, is unable to face the truth about himself. He kids himself into believing that he is well liked by his customers in the New England territory and.....

Linda Loman - Linda Loman, Willy's faithful wife, is the most sympathetic character in the play. Downtrodden and leading a seemingly miserable existence, Linda still truly loves her husband in spite of all his faults and always stands by him. Although she spends her life cooking, cleaning, trying to make ends meet, and bolstering Willy's sense of self-importance, she never complains about the way she lives. Instead, she complains about how shabbily her sons, Happy and Biff, treat their father. She even tells Biff that he cannot come home again unless he learns to get along better with Willy.

Linda's weakness is that she does not have the

Biff Loman - Biff is the older of Willy's two sons. He is an attractive man, even though he is a failure in life. In high school, Biff was a star football player, winning several scholarships. Unfortunately, he was unable to continue his education because he failed math, even though Bernard tried to make him study and helped him to cheat on the exam. He also began stealing in high school and was never.....

Happy Loman - Happy is the younger son of Willy Loman and is unattractive and overweight. As a boy, he was over-shadowed by his older brother Biff, who was doted upon by Willy because he was handsome and a star football player. Though Happy never expressed any overt resentment over the excessive attention paid to Biff, he constantly seeks his father's approval. He always tells Willy that he is losing weight, trying to please the man.

On the surface Happy seems to be a responsible young man. Unlike Biff, he has.....

Charley - Charley is a long-time friend of Willy; in fact, Biff and Happy call him Uncle Charley. Charley is a successful businessman and father. He owns his own company, and his son, Bernard, is a successful lawyer. Where Willy lives in a world of dreams, Charley is a man of practicality. He does not care about personal attractiveness. He does not have time to tell jokes, and he thinks sports are a.....

Ben Loman - Ben is Willy's dead brother, who exists in Willy's illusions. He is a shadow figure in the play, who functions more as a symbol than he does as a character. Ben becomes the ideal for Willy, for he made a fortune at a young age. The story goes that he entered the "jungle" when he was seventeen; when he came out four years later, he was a rich man. This kind of success is beyond the reach of.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Although the plot of the play is basically unified by time, place, and characters, there is one striking exception. The present setting of the play takes place in a single day in 1942, in and around the Loman household in New York. There are only three main characters – Willy, Biff, and Happy. There are even few minor characters, such as Linda, Charley, Bernard, Oliver, and Ben. As a result, it would seem that the play was structured in an extremely tight fashion. However, the entire chronological progression of the play is repeatedly interrupted by a series of flashbacks that occur in Willy's mind as dreams or illusions. The flashbacks go as far into the past as 1928 and reach to places outside of New York, including a hotel room in Boston. Sometimes, the flashbacks make the play difficult to follow, for it is hard to distinguish the past from the present on.....

THEMES - THEMES ANALYSIS

In *Death of Salesman*, there are recurring themes or motifs that unify the play and blend together in the last act to give a paradoxical or ironic comment on the drama. The first dominant motif is the false importance placed on personal attractiveness and popularity. To the protagonist Willy Loman, being handsome and well liked is all-important. Willy naively believes that if a person is attractive and popular, the entire world opens up for

him, guaranteeing success and answering the American Dream. Willy sees the personification of this in the salesman, David Singleman, whom he describes in the play as the man who has obtained.....

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Willy Loman as a pathetically tragic figure. What actually overcomes him in life?
2. Which character in the play changes the most? Support your answer with specific detail.
3. What aspects of American society are criticized by Arthur Miller in the play "Death of a Salesman"?.....

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